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ABSTRACT

The Office of Indian Education (OIE) is a classic example of what happens when a new element or force is introduced in a bureaucratic structure and attempts to propose and implement change in the behavior of individuals in the organization. OIE was administered and functioned from the beginning in a loose and non-directive manner, and within the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) (before the Department of Education), OIE operated as a step-child. OIE continually received high visibility and high interest from internal bureaucrats, yet received low priority when resources were allocated. Procedures, formats, and directions changed in midstream. At times USOE/ED policy was unclear and confusing to implement. Key OIE personnel functioned in so many acting capacities that they were taxed to the limit. New leadership (Dr. Gipp) advocated and practiced the concepts of quality, responsiveness, program improvement, accountability, effective management, and change and then consistency, but the total resource capacity of OIE was so committed that the scope for new initiatives (change) was zero or even negative. Although management instituted changes to address program improvement, educational specialists became so involved with grant maintenance and compliance issues that no time was left for real educational assistance. OIE did, however, accomplish its major objectives. Seven recommendations conclude the paper. (BRR)

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE OFFICE OF INDIAN EDUCATION

(1978-1980)

By

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1980

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE OFFICE OF INDIAN EDUCATION
(1978-1980)

The Office of Indian Education (OIE) is a classic example of what happens when a new element or force is introduced in a bureaucratic structure and attempts to propose and implement change in the behavior of individuals in the organization. The condition is further complicated when the resource capability of a subunit remains the same and when the change takes place in a small part of the overall structure. Let me briefly describe, from my perspective, the dynamics of OIE. Then, I will offer recommendations to ease the conditions.

BACKGROUND

From the beginning, OIE was administered and functioned in a loose and non-directive approach. There was a lack of consistency in the direction given by OIE leadership, especially in the everyday interpretation of policies and procedures. In fact, much of the direction taken by program specialists was self motivated and self given. Authority became decentralized and filtered down from the Deputyship to the Division and Branch levels. The result was that the informal organizational structure controlled the formal structure. The informal system was characterized by inconsistency, special relationships among employees, favoritism, and "doing my own thing".

Within U.S.O.E. (before the Department of Education) OIE functioned as a step-child. And received formal recognition as a Bureau only because the Indian Education Act of 1972 mandated a structure with a Deputy Commissioner for Indian Education reporting directly to the Commissioner. Otherwise, OIE would have been far removed from the top management of U.S.O.E./HEW. OIE continually received high visibility and high interest from internal bureaucrats, yet received low priority when resources were allocated. The reason for high interest by a majority of the bureaucrats was suspect, missionary zeal, helping "Indians" or

emotional guilt may have been the real interest factor.

Now, enter new leadership (Dr. Gipp). Leadership that advocated and practiced the concepts of quality, responsiveness, program improvement, accountability, effective management, change and consistency. The timing appeared right for this new direction from OIE management because the following vehicles were in place: 1) Reauthorization of the Indian Education Act, 2) Need to develop and revise the rules and regulations, 3) Need to develop and revise the application packets, 4) Need to revise the grants process, 5) Yearly budget process, and 6) New leadership in OIE and USOE.

In addition, the organizational placement of OIE in USOE provided direct access to the top person in education, the United States Commissioner of Education. Since the Commissioner of Education was instrumental in the selection of Dr. Gipp, it was reasonable to expect his personal interest and support in Dr. Gipp's actions.

USOE SUPPORT

The potential for change broke down at this point. The balance between what needed to be done and the resources and support available to accomplish each task was so far out of balance that justice did indeed seem blind. Consider the following:

- An analysis of the managers in OIE revealed that criteria other than management capability and interest in Indian Education was used to place a number of individuals in key positions. The result was that expectations and behavior differed significantly.

- Key management positions were filled or occupied by individuals in acting authority. There was lack of support from top USOE/ED managers to allow the positions to be filled on a permanent basis. For example: During my two years, commitments were made by the Commissioner of Education, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Secretary of Education/HEW, and the acting Commissioner of Education during the transition period to move an OIE Division Director out of the position so it could be filled. That never happened over a two year period and after repeated statements that it would take place.

-There was clearly a lack of support and understanding from other offices that supported OIE (GPMD, Regulations, Budget, General Counsel, Personnel, Policy, and Top Management). Granted, these relations improved during my two years (based on comments expressed to me) at USOE/ED. I also realize that each one of these offices were hindered by their own bureaucratic operation. Many times support in these offices depended on the attitude and/or interest of one individual. However, even with this improvement, the system that governed the relationship broke down to further hamper support. For example: The development of regulations took well over two years.

It was a long, hard and often frustrating experience simply because of the direction given OIE by other USOE/ED program managers. Procedures, formats, and directions changed in midstream. At times USOE/ED policy was unclear and proved confusing in its implementation.

It was noted above that key individuals (managers) functioned in acting capacities. This taxed to the limit many OIE personnel. My own experience can be used as an example. There were times when I was acting Deputy Commissioner, had my own regular function as Associate Deputy, Acting Division Director, and Acting Executive Officer. Work loads were heavy, with program specialists responsible for 90-100 grants, staffing was never at full strength, and when positions were filled OIE had little choice in selecting people. In addition, the employee union and EEO were strong and active, advocating employee rights and requiring time and resources to respond to their requests and to insure procedures were followed.

Take this situation, add new OIE leadership; with new expectations; the mentioned mechanisms to implement change, and what happens. First, the total resource capacity of OIE was so committed that the scope for new initiatives (change) was zero or even negative. Frustration emerged, certain employees were asked to do more. Some did, others rebelled. Relief was sought through budget increases and new staff positions were funded. But even here, bureaucratic roadblocks prevent full or additional staffing to occur.

Management instituted changes to address program improvement. Authority and direction became centralized to address consistency. Employees were held

accountable for their work. Consistency in job performance was addressed and job responsibilities became standardized. Employees resisted because this represented a change and a certain amount of freedom in their job responsibilities was lost. Areas that hit close to employees, i.e., travel, comp-time, time and attendance, job responsibilities and grade classification were addressed.

Educational specialists came to OIE expecting to function as "Educational Specialists" in the true sense of the term, that is, giving educational assistance and direction to grantees. This was especially true of new specialists that were hired. In reality, this didn't happen. The specialists became so involved with grant maintenance and compliance issues that no time was left for real educational assistance. This was a situation that lead to conflict, frustration, mistrust, and a belief that management intentionally held back specialists from providing educational assistance. The already divided loyalties and fragmented interests became increasingly polarized. Some left the office vowing to fight to the end.

In addition, most career bureaucrats had direct informal networks to sources outside of OIE. Information flowed both within and outside the Department of Education to Congress, tribes, special interest groups, organizations, etc. These channels of communication were used by certain individuals to "get back" at OIE management. Top OIE management was most vulnerable at this time with management activities, including directives that addressed change, are the easiest to attack. These included the grants process, reauthorization, implementation of the law, rules and regulations, student eligibility form, application packets, etc. Intertwined in all this were personal attitudes individuals had toward each other. Feelings were so strong that personal attacks were the result i.e., sexual harassment.

Congress with its increasing willingness to participate in administrative decisions, got involved and used people to attack programs that were based on law. The media, grantees, others, got involved to join the attack on the

program. The whole thing snowballed and was blown completely out of proportion. When this happened strong support within the system, from top USOE/ED management to NACIE, was needed for the good of the program. And top ED management should have been willing to accept the blame, as they do the praise, when things go wrong. Outsiders, including grantees, tend to see only OIE and not beyond into the dark bowels of the bureaucracy.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

These are my observations. Yet, when the larger picture is viewed, OIE accomplished its major objectives. Consider the following:

-The grants have been awarded using a process that in general is accepted and recognized as good as any in ED.

-Reauthorization took place.

-New rules and regulations were developed. They are considered to be a major improvement compared with the old regulations. They reflect a total re-write of the old regulations, even though a total re-write was not required.

-The budget increased over the past three years, after a difficult start in 1973 and a period when the administrations request was less than what Congress finally appropriated.

-The majority of OIE staff are sincerely interested and dedicated to Indian Education and the provisions of the Indian Education Act (IEA).

-Major evaluation efforts are in progress for all IEA program areas (through contracts) that will yield Congressional requested data that can be used in program improvement and budget justifications.

-Improved relations with support offices in ED.

-Implementation on Congressionally mandated provisions in 95-561.

-A dedication to strive toward program improvement in grant administration in the face of adversity.

-Revised application packets, for all OIE programs.

-Planned toward and implementation of a travel plan and approach to meet the "rolling audit" mandate.

-Increased technical assistance to current and potential grantees, through staff training, regional and national technical assistance conferences and the establishment of the Evaluation and Resource Centers.

-Developed a plan to reorganize OIE along functional lines to insure improved service to grantees.

-Increased emphasis on evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Offer and demonstrate, through action, support for OIE. Support must go beyond vocal endorsement, but must be followed by clear, direct action. The recent comments by Under Secretary Steve Minter and Assistant Secretary Tom Minter at the National Indian Education Association's annual convention are immediate examples. The support they voiced to Indian educators must be followed with supportive action.
2. Get the grants out on time. Provide all the support needed to get the FY 81 OIE grants out on schedule. Nothing would gain greater support for the program, nothing would bring about respect and credibility than getting grants out on time. Given the past history this remains as the most important concern from grantees.
3. Support, approve, and implement the plan to reorganize the administrative structure of OIE.
4. Be willing to accept some of the criticism and pressure exerted on IEA programs. Support the notion and reality that OIE is but a small part of DE and, thus, cannot begin to control the total environment of DE. Other support offices must take the blame when it is their office that is at fault. There is a tendency for grantees (including potential grantees and congressional people) to look only toward OIE for reasons when things go wrong.
5. Increase OIE funding and staff. This is especially critical if grants are to get out on schedule.
6. Take a stronger stance on the separation of powers between Congress and DE programs. Congress needs to be reminded that certain decisions are administrative and program in nature and clearly within the legal authority of the Executive Branch.

7. Provide clear administrative direction to OIE. Especially in the areas of personnel management. Employees are extremely sensitive to areas of pay, time and attendance, comp-time, leave, travel, etc. Often policies and implementing procedures in these areas are unclear, lacking, and/or confusing. This will help provide consistency and lessen internal conflict and allow an increased amount of time for major job functions.

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